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ABSTRACT

These three papers are from a symposium that was facilitated by R. Wayne Pace at the 1995 conference of the Academy of Human Resource Development (HRD). "High Performance Work Systems" (Martha A. Gephart) assesses the state of theory and research on high performance work from a "systems" perspective and identifies challenges for future theory and research. "The New Paradigm of HRD: A Holistic Model" (Holly E. Nordquist) describes the current framework of HRD practice. It also documents a shift that mirrors the change occurring in business and industry, the most significant characteristic of which is the move from competition to cooperation. The literature that supports this assertion is reviewed, and a new model for the practice of HRD is presented. "Designing Action Reflection Learning Research: Balancing Research Needs against Real-World Constraints" (Lyle Yorks et al.) explores considerations unique to research on Action Reflection Learning programs in which the role of the researcher bears a similarity to a key purpose of the program itself: reflection from an outsider's perspective. It describes the program studied and the research design, as both intended and actually implemented, and looks at boundary management issues and their implications. (YLB)

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[2] **CORE DIRECTIONS IN HRD** Facilitator: R. Wayne Pace, Brigham Young University

High Performance Work Systems
Martha A. Gephart, American Society for Training and Development

The New Paradigm of Human Resource Development: A Holistic Model
Holly E. Nordquist, University of Minnesota

Designing Action Reflection Learning Research: Balancing Research Needs & Real-World Constraints
Lyle Yorks, Eastern Connecticut State University
Victoria Marsick, Teachers College, Columbia University
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High Performance Work Systems

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Rising competition in world and domestic markets during the past two decades has led increasing numbers of U. S. firms to undertake innovations in their work systems. By the mid 1990s, a new vision of what constitutes an effective work system seems to have emerged. The concept of high performance work system has increasingly been used to describe this vision and the innovations in the organization of work that have occurred in a number of different companies. A variety of approaches have been used to define high performance work. A key to all of them is the incresing recognition of the importance of human resources in performance and competitiveness. This paper assesses the state of theory and research on high performance work from a "systems" perspective, and it identifies challenges for future theory and research.

Dramatic changes have occurred in the financial and organizational structures of American business during the past decade. Takeovers and buyouts have transformed the control and ownership of many firms while organizational restructuring has transformed the work environment and product focus of many companies. These changes have been driven by demands for greater share holder value and by increasing competition in global and domestic markets. They have been facilitated by advances in information systems and the spread of quality programs (Capelli, 1994).

Changing ideas about the best way to organize corporations have also stimulated changes. The idea that successful firms have a distinct competency that differentiates them from competitors and drives their competitiveness (Prahalad & Hammel, 1990) has led companies to rid themselves of unnecessary functions and to outsource tasks that are not part of their core competencies.

In response to internal and external pressures, companies have reduced costs through downsizing and introduced new forms of work and principles of organizational design (Useem, 1994). The elusive goal has been higher performance, sustained over time. By the mid 1990s, a new vision of what constitutes an effective work system seems to have emerged. The concept of a high performance work system has increasingly been used to describe this vision and the innovations in the organization of work that have occurred in a number of companies.

High Performance Work: Practices, Strategies, Principles, or Systems?

Much of the discussion of high performance work has focused on discrete practices such as self-managing teams, quality circles, profit sharing, gainsharing, and training. In their review of experiments with workplace innovation, Appelbaum and Batt (1994) identified a set of strategies that lead to high performance: work reorganization, human resource strategies, management methods, and industrial relations strategies. Others (Bassi, Gould, Kulik, & Zornitsky, 1993; Lawler, 1992) have identified sets of principles dealing with employee involvement, participative management, open communication, rewards and recognition, continuous improvement, and skill and knowledge development that are common to diverse mixes of high performance work practices and strategies. There is considerable overlap among the practices, strategies, and principles identified by different authors, reflecting apparent consensus about the components that are thought to characterize high performance work systems in the contemporary period.

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The Importance of Human Resources in Performance and Competitiveness

A key to all of the approaches is the increasing recognition of the importance of human resources in performance and competitiveness. In the face of dramatically changing competitive environments, many of the traditional strategic levers cannot provide the same levels of sustained competitive advantage and average profitability as in the past. There is an increasing emphasis on how a firm does business, and a key element is the extent to which a firm's human resource strategy supports larger strategic objectives. Scholars have begun to argue that a firm's human resources can provide a unique source of competitive advantage that is difficult for its competitors to replicate (Capelli & Singh, 1992; Wright & McMahan, 1992). At issue, is whether or how, firms can capitalize on this potential source of unrealized profitability.

Theoretical Perspectives

A number of different theoretical perspectives suggest mechanisms that link human resource policies to performance. Human capital theory emphasizes the acquisition and development of employee skills; psychological theories emphasize employee motivation and commitment; industrial relations theories emphasize effective worker representation and voice. All three perspectives share the notion that practices and policies affect performance primarily through their effects on the contribution and quality of labor input. Each emphasizes the logic of a systems approach although the frameworks draw attention to different systems of policies.

In a recent review article, Bailey (1993) argues that innovative HR practices yield better economic performance when they elicit "discretionary" effort from employees and when that effort can be effectively channeled to affect economic outcomes. Bailey argues that HR management practices can affect discretionary effort through their influence over employee skills, employee motivation, and the organizational structures that enable employees to perform effectively.

The link between worker attitudes, the organization of work, and firm performance is discussed extensively in the literature on work teams. Cohen (1993) identified two main theoretical explanations for the effectiveness of work teams--job characteristics theory and sociotechnical theory. The theories are quite similar in their identification of the key attributes of the design of the work group's task that contribute to team effectiveness. The theories differ, however, in their explanations of how these attributes affect team performance. In job characteristics theory, the explanation is primarily psychological and motivational. In contrast, sociotechnical theory views team self-regulation as the primary mechanism through which the design of the work group's task influences outcomes. Motivational effects are acknowledged, but the theory emphasizes the ability of teams to allocate resources efficiently and to make on-line decisions and process improvement in the course of doing their work. Empirical studies of teams provide support for both explanations.

A Systems Perspective

Much of the theoretical work on the impact of human resource strategies on performance has emphasized the role of "fit" among HR strategies and between them and corporate strategies (Milgrom & Roberts, 1993). The presumption is that more effective systems of HR management practices, which simultaneously exploit the potential for complementarities or synergies among such practices and forge a link with the firm's competitive strategy, are sources of competitive advantage.

A system of interrelated, overlapping HR practices may lead to improved performance by providing several ways for workers to acquire skills (e.g., off-the-job and on-the-job training, job rotation, problem-solving groups) and multiple incentives to boost motivation. As Hackman (1985) writes, performance may be "an overdetermined phenomenon", the product of multiple non-independent factors whose influence depends in part on the fact that they are redundant.

Osterman (1987) argues that there should be an underlying logic to the firm's system of HR management practices, and that certain policies and practices fit together in an internally consistent framework. Brown and her colleagues (1993) illustrate this argument, articulating the nature of interdependence among employment security, employee involvement, and training.

Ichniowski, Shaw & Prennushi (1993) describe three sources of complementarity among HR policies described in the theoretical literature: cultural complementarities that arise from complementary practices needed to create an environment of positive peer pressure; trust-based complementarities that arise when a firm has a reputation for being trustworthy; and technical complementarities, that arise when one policy requires the adoption of another in order to work most effectively. The existence of such complementarities suggests that firms should not make marginal decisions with regard to the use of HR practices, and that they will profit most from making discrete jumps in the use of clusters of practices.

Researchers have developed many typologies for innovative HR practices (see summary in Bailey, 1993), categorized in terms of their impact on, for example, motivation or skill development or work structures. Given that any single practice may play a multifaceted role in the overall human resource system, there is no clear conceptual basis for separating practices affecting motivation from those affecting skill. For example, work teams represent a restructuring of work organization that integrates human resources more fully into the production system, but they also develop worker skills and influence motivation and commitment.

A number of researchers (MacDuffie, forthcoming; Osterman, 1994) have distinguished between practices that affect the organization of work and the way work tasks are carried out, and those that reflect firm-level human resource policies affecting employees at all levels. In the treatment of systems or "bundles" of practices, it is implicit that practices within bundles will be interrelated and internally consistent. Also implicit is the idea that "more is better" with respect to impact on performance.

Thus, the systems hypothesis is that combinations of HR practices will have bigger effects on performance than the sum of component effects due to individual policies. A growing literature suggests that firms attempt to match their HR management practices with their culture and business strategy (Osterman, 1987; Cutcher-Gershenfeld, 1991; Arthur, 1992; Snell & Dean, in press; Snell & Dean, 1992; Ichniowski, 1990). If complementarities are important, research that focuses on the impact of individual practices on performance may produce misleading results, with a single practice capturing the effect of the entire HR system.

Best Practice Versus Contingency Models

The "internal fit" perspective suggests that the adoption of an internally consistent system of high performance work practices will be reflected in better firm performance, other things being equal. This implies that it should be possible to identify a series of HR management "best practices," or a high performance workplace system, whose adoption generally leads to valued firm-level outcomes. According to the best practice view, the new demands on organizations are so pervasive that there exists a set of core HR management practices or high performance work practices that are common to most high performance work organizations, irrespective of their particular corporate strategy (Delaney et al., 1989; Ichniowski, 1990; Pfeffer, 1994).

The contingency, or "external fit" perspective questions whether any particular HR policy can ever be described as a "best practice" and suggests that the efficiency of any individual practice or system of such practices can only be determined within the context of a particular firm's strategic and environmental contingencies, especially those related to product and labor markets and the underlying production technology (Dunlop & Weil, 1995). According to this view, product market forces will determine a "modal" set of viable human resource practices, while firm-specific choices will result in variability around that mode. According to the contingency perspective, viewing human resource innovations separate from other practices necessary to adapt to new market conditions potentially overstates the impact of these innovations on competitive outcomes.

A growing body of research in several fields has compared practices across organizations

in an attempt to identify practices or clusters of practices that produce better performance results. Much of the existing literature, however, examines the effectiveness of individual reforms in workplace systems, such as mechanisms for participation, compensation systems, and training, without sufficient consideration of the interrelations among the elements of an employment system or of the role of the external environment (Levine, in press).

During the past several years, studies have begun to assess links between systems of practices and performance outcomes. Some studies use the corporate holding company as the unit of analysis, enabling them to link to publicly available data and assess the relationships between systems of practices and firm performance. Other studies use establishment-level indicators of performance, with researchers examining the impact of organization-level practices on these outcomes controlling for other possible influences, such as technology in use.

This new research includes both studies across firms in different industries and industry-specific studies. The appeal of industry-specific studies is the implicit control of unmeasured variables that might bias the results. Variation in HR strategies within the same industry do not face the potential contamination by unmeasured industry-differences that confront multi-industry samples.

Definitions and Measurement of Systems

A variety of definitions of systems has been used in studies that have tried to test the hypothesis that combinations of practices will have bigger effects. Several studies (Arthur, 1992; Osterman, 1994) use the construct of a "transformed" organization, but each defines and measures that construct differently. Arthur (1992) used employee involvement, decentralized decision-making, employee participation, and general training to classify steel "minimills." He measured these concepts quite broadly and derived six HR clusters, which he divided into two groups--one cost minimizing, the other commitment maximizing. Osterman (1994) focused on self-directed work teams, job rotation, problem solving groups and total quality management in a cross-industry establishment-level survey. He defined plants as transformed if they used at least two of these approaches to work organization, with 50% or more of employees involved in those practices.

Lawler and his colleagues (Lawler, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1992) defined a system or collection of employee practices that involve decision-making power, rewards for collective performance, information sharing, and training. A number of scholars have defined an emerging employment system characterized by three elements: a high degree of employment security based upon flexible job assignment; employee involvement in problem solving and continuous improvement; and continuous training of all employees. Huselid (in press) factor analyzed a set of popular human resource practices and followed Bailey's theoretical arguments in labeling the two factors: employee skills and organizational structures; and employee motivation. Ichniowski (1990) used a clustering algorithm to identify similar groupings of businesses with distinctive personnel policy groupings. MacDuffie (forthcoming) created three indices to operationalize the organizational logic of flexible and mass production systems in auto assembly plants--use of buffers, work system, and HR policies. He clustered the three bundles of practices to determine which plants were "lean" and which were not, or in transition.

High Performance Work Systems: What works? What doesn't?

Despite the disparate ways in which systems of practices have been defined and measured, there is a growing body of work that supports the view that transformed work systems function best when they are part of a coherent system of work reorganization, job design, and human resource and industrial relations practices.

Recent review articles provide empirical support for the systems view. Weitzman and Kruse (1990), in a meta-analysis of research on contingent compensation plans, find that the majority of studies show such plans have weak but positive effects on performance. The strongest

effects occur when contingent pay is combined with some form of employee participation. Similarly, in a review of research on the effects of employee participation, Levine and Tyson (1990) find that the performance impact is greatest when participation is substantive, involving influence over how work is done, rather than consultative.

Several recent large-sample cross-industry surveys also find a positive association between bundles of innovative HR practices and various performance measures (Ichniowski, 1990; Mitchell, Lewin & Lawler, 1990; Huselid, in press; Lawler, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1992).

MacDuffie (forthcoming) investigated whether HR practices occur as interrelated, internally consistent "bundles" that are integrated with manufacturing policies under the "organizational logic" of the production system. Each of the indices (work systems, buffers, HR practices) had high internal consistency. Each was also correlated with the other two indices. Cluster analysis distinguished three groups of plants--mass production, transition, a and flexible production--which differed significantly in mean values for these indices and the practices bundled within them.

Ichniowski (1990) found that businesses with the highest levels of performance had "high commitment" HR systems with flexible job design, employee training, extensive communication systems, and merit-based reward structures. Businesses that employed many, but not all features of the "high commitment" HR system exhibited significantly lower levels of labor productivity and lower stock market values than the high commitment systems, suggesting that businesses need to adopt all of the policies in this system to enjoy its performance advantages.

Ichniowski, Shaw and Prennushi (1993) found evidence of a high degree of correlation among HR practices that reflect cultural, trust-based, and technical complementarities.

Effects on Performance

A number of studies have demonstrated links between a measure of HR systems and establishment-level measures of performance. The best of these (Arthur, 1994; Delaney, in press; Ichniowski, Shaw, & Prennushi, 1993; MacDuffie, forthcoming) provide persuasive evidence that innovative systems of HR management practices have significant effects on measures of performance, primarily in certain manufacturing industries.

Delaney (in press) found the widespread use of progressive HR management practices to have strong and negative effects on organizational turnover in the manufacturing sector. Ichniowski, Shaw, and Prennushi (1993), using longitudinal data from 30 steel plants, found a significant impact of "cooperative and innovative" HR management practices on organizational productivity. They also found that marginal changes in individual policies have little or no effect on productivity; improving productivity required substantial changes in a set of HR policies (p. 36). Arthur (in press) found in 30 steel "minimills" that firms with "commitment" HR systems (emphasizing the development of employee commitment to the firm) had lower turnover and scrap rates, and higher productivity than did firms with "control" HR systems (emphasizing efficiency and the reduction of labor costs).

MacDuffie and Krafcik (1992) found that use of buffers and HR policies contributed almost equally to the strong relationships between production organization and productivity. With quality as the outcome measure, however, the HR policies measure was the most influential component.

Finally, MacDuffie (forthcoming) found that internally consistent "bundles" that are integrated with manufacturing policies under the organizational logic of the production system contribute to assembly plant productivity and quality. Hypothesized two-way and three-way interaction effects among the buffers, work organization, and HR practices bundles emerged strongly. Overall, the evidence provides strong support for the hypothesis that assembly plants using flexible production systems, which bundle human resource practices into a system that is integrated with the production/business strategy, outperform plants using more traditional mass production systems in both productivity and quality. These results are perhaps the strongest evidence to date of a positive relationship between innovative human resource practices and

economic performance, particularly given the comprehensive international sample, the presence of strong control variables, the high reliability of the context-specific measures of performance and HR practices and the discovery of statistically significant interaction effects in a small sample.

One pilot study conducted in the apparel industry has investigated the role of mediating mechanisms as well as the effects of human resource and industrial relations practices. Berg, Appelbaum, Bailey, and Kalleberg (1994, p. 37) concluded that the performance of module production practices and associated human resource practices was superior because of economies of self-regulation, which depend strongly on the gains from coordination. Neither job satisfaction nor organization commitment of workers, which were included as potential mediating mechanisms, was correlated with the modules.

Findings that systems of high performance work practices affect turnover or productivity do not necessarily mean that these practices have any effect on firm profits. Ichniowski (1990) reported results consistent with the proposition that progressive high commitment strategies emphasizing flexible job designs, training and communication have a positive influence on firm financial performance. Huselid (in press) surveyed more than 3400 firms that were domestically owned, publicly-held, employed more than 100 employees and were not a publicly held division of a larger company or a holding company. Responses indicating the breadth and depth of the use of thirteen HR policy characteristics were factor analyzed. The resulting factors were labeled following Bailey's theoretical analysis. Both dimensions were positively related to firm economic performance as measured by Tobin's Q, although the impact of the employee motivation dimension was more stable and economically significant. Despite the attractiveness of being able to match with publicly available data, there are several drawbacks of such firm level studies. Establishments within one company can exhibit radically different HR practices. Moreover, corporate level perceptions about such practices may be only loosely correlated with actual practices in the workplace.

Assessing the Best Practice Versus Contingency Arguments

The empirical literature has done little to distinguish between these two formulations. To date, there is little support for the contingency argument. One might conclude that the simple adoption of systems of high performance work practices is more important than efforts to ensure that these policies are aligned with firm competitive strategy. However, the theoretical arguments for external fit remain compelling, and more research is required before reaching the conclusion that it does not matter.

Extent of adoption

A low level of diffusion of high performance work practices is evident in most studies of adoption. Firms engaged in international competition are more likely to adopt such practices as are firms that emphasize product quality and variety. Several studies note that there are high up front costs associated with transforming plants (Berg et al., 1994; Ichniowski, Shaw, & Prennushi, 1993). Ichniowski and his colleagues found that the differences between changers and nonchangers were: the credible threat of plant closure; differences in opinions regarding whether innovative practices will really work; and the cost of regaining lost trust. As a result, greenfield sites are more likely to adopt innovative practices. MacDuffie and Krafcik (1992) note that the switch from mass production to lean production is far from simple. Because the bundle of practices and policies that make up lean production are so closely interrelated, transitional states, in which some aspects of both systems are in place, are treacherous.

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Caveats and Challenges for Future Research

Sources of Bias Cross sectional research does not permit us to draw conclusions about the direction of causality. Successful firms may engage in high performance work practices as a form of consumption rather than as a strategy to improve performance. Osterman (1994) provides evidence that organizational slack and employee-oriented values are associated with high performance work systems. To sort out the causality issue requires a panel design. To date, there is no research in which practices are introduced and effects are assessed later. Huselid (in press) did include adjustments for endogeneity. Most of the corrections produced estimates of the impact of high performance work practices which were larger than the original estimates. But, he, like others, expressed reservations about these estimates.

Because survey respondents self-select into samples, the probability of responding to a questionnaire may be related to the presence of high performance work practices. The most serious form of selection bias would occur if the probability of responding to a questionnaire is related both to a firm's financial performance and to the presence of high performance work practices.

Even more intractable than endogeneity or selection bias is the possibility that characteristics of the firm which may be associated with both the presence of high performance work practices and firm performance are not observed by the researchers (Huselid & Becker, 1995, p. 4). For example, firms with more sophisticated human resource practices may also have adopted more sophisticated strategies in marketing, finance, production, etc. Just as focusing on one or two HR management practices may overstate their effect if high performance HR management practices tend to cluster together, so too might a single focus on HR strategies overstate their effect by ignoring the presence of important policies in other phases of the firm's operation.

Varying Definitions of Practices and Systems The choices of which HR practices to measure, the measures used, the analytical tools and the resulting constructs vary dramatically (Hunter & Pil, 1995). Definitions of high performance practices are unclear. Not only are there problems with common meaning of questions and practices, but no two researchers use the same meaning of high performance work systems. A clearer definition of concepts and domains is crucial for cumulative knowledge to develop. High performance work systems is a term that has arisen out of popular usage, not precise theoretical construction.

Practices and elements measured include teams, training, job design, and compensation. Measurement varies from study to study and survey to survey (Hunter & Pil, 1995). Behavioral content questions should be used that enable researchers to make equivalence judgments (Kelley & Emison, 1995). Instead of asking if an establishment has teams, surveys or interviewers need to describe the actual practice. We need to know if there is some underlying behavior or practice that we can actually observe that is common across organizations.

Dimensions of Performance Existing studies use a number of different measures of performance. Productivity measures that are most often used to assess firm performance are inadequate (Sink & Smith, 1992). Defined as a ratio of outputs to inputs, these traditional cost-based measures of performance are less and less appropriate as the global economy moves toward more time-based competition, market dynamics increases, and work activities become organized around cross-functional flows of materials and products. There has been a growing interest in alternative measures of performance that take account of quality, reliability, short cycle ties, flexibility, innovation, customer service and social responsibility (Dixon, Nanni, & Vollmann, 1990; Sink, 1993). Improvement in some measures of performance may be achieved at the expense of others. A clear distinction between dimensions of performance is needed in future research. Such distinctions may enable us to integrate industry specific studies by identifying patterns of results in focused, clearly conceptualized categories, such as productivity, quality, cycle time, customer service and the like (Hunter & Pil, 1995).

Intervening Mechanisms A limitation of the studies just summarized is that most focus only on formal structures and practices. Such structures and practices are important only insofar as they shape the day-to-day behavior of people in the workplace, and the meanings associated with that behavior. Greater attention is needed to assessing a variety of processes at the individual,

team, and organizational levels that may intervene between practices and structures and improvements in performance. Such processes include employee motivation and commitment, communication and information sharing, and organizational learning.

The key to better definitions of high performance work systems is the development of stronger theory connecting practices and outcomes. It is very important to measure the intervening behavior and attitudinal processes that are thought to result in higher performance. While case studies can help to illuminate the very different ways in which high performance workplaces operate, multi-level research designs are needed to systematically analyze practices, intervening processes, and outcomes across establishments. In such studies, the establishment is the unit of analysis that makes the most sense. A multi-level research design that surveys workers, not just HR managers, would allow us to determine how practices are being implemented and how they work (see Berg et al., 1994).

Conclusions

We lack clarity about what a high performance work system is. However, it is clear that human resource practices do matter for competitive performance. Systems of practices can have big effects on competitive performance outcomes. There is no magic bullet; systemic changes are needed. Work teams are one small part of the picture.

Because the use of clusters of practices is likely to improve performance, new businesses are especially likely to use them. Older companies are not as likely to make changes. The failure of piecemeal changes discourages more systematic changes. Moreover, the practices require high levels of trust among workers, mangers, and union officials.

A key issue that is often skirted in debates about high performance workplaces is the tradeoffs between firm performance and the well-being of workers. The changes that have occurred in American businesses have increased participation and upskilling. But there is also a dark side. A lot of dislocation has occurred. The definitions and meaning of high performance work are different for business and worker communities. More explicit attention to these value differences and trade-offs is needed if mutual gains are to be achieved.

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The New Paradigm of Human Resource Development: A Holistic Model

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Human Resource Development has been undergoing a paradigm shift that mirrors the shift occuring in business and industry. The most significant characteristic of this shift is the move from competition to cooperation. The literature that supports this assertion is reviewed, and a new model for the practice of HRD is presented.

Ever since Thomas Kuhn introduced his notion of the "scientific paradigm" in 1962 in his now famous book The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, the term, paradigm, has been used and popularized to the point where, as commonly occurs with new terms and concepts, it has found its way into everyday American parlance. Particularly in the past decade, almost every sphere of human life has been in the process of examining its own paradigm, looking at the beliefs and assumptions that underlie it and direct our activities. The sphere of Human Resource Development (HRD) is no exception.

This complex process of examining beliefs and assumptions is not an easy task. Difficulty notwithstanding, the purpose of this paper is twofold: first, to examine the current HRD paradigm by looking at the assumptions that underlie it, and second, to suggest a new paradigm for the practice of HRD. However, launching into a discussion about assumptions and paradigms is risky business. The risk stems primarily from the language barrier experienced while standing in one paradigm and looking into another. In addition to reducing the risk by defining key terms, I intend to carry out the purpose of this paper by examining the existing paradigm in which HRD is practiced. I will also briefly discuss the scientific impetus behind major paradigm shifts. I will then present evidence that there are shifting assumptions already occurring in the field of HRD. Finally, I will present a set of "new" assumptions which could create a new paradigm: a holistic model of HRD. Whether old paradigm or new, my premise is this: knowing the assumptions underlying a model is necessary to doing good work in Human Resource Development.

Rationale

The complex field of Human Resource Development is a dynamic and evolving one. It, too, is in the process of self-examination, as evidenced by recent best-sellers that present new and challenging approaches to improving organizational effectiveness. The experts, in presenting the latest ideas, set forth rules, guidelines, and models as being the answers to organizational problems and

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concerns.

Knowing the assumptions underlying any model is necessary primarily because the knowledge creates congruence, alignment, and consistency of the activity that occurs within the model. These characteristics of the model give it its "attraction" property. That is, a magnet attracts only because the structures within it are in perfect alignment with each other.

As stated earlier, operational definitions of key terms will facilitate understanding. The key terms in this discussion are paradigm, assumption, holism, and Human Resource Development.

Operational Definitions

Paradigm. Thomas Kuhn (1962) asserted that paradigms are "universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners" (p. viii). Although Kuhn is the person most responsible for bringing the term to our awareness, he himself used it in no less than 21 different ways (Guba, 1990). Casti (1989) explains that Kuhn's original notion of a scientific paradigm referred to the presuppositions and assumptions that pervade every aspect of human activity.

In current organizational theory, the word paradigm refers to those underlying principles which drive the everyday activity of any organization (Fletcher, 1990). A paradigm shift, then, is a different way of looking at things; a movement from one set of assumptions to another. In the context of organizational change, it could mean, for example, acquiring new cultural values, practices, technologies, and standards within an organization.

A paradigm could be thought of as an invisible framework that becomes visible only under certain circumstances, as in the ability to observe infrared rays when wearing special glasses. For the purposes of this paper, I will define paradigm as the framework or worldview that is made up of diverse sets of assumptions responsible for driving all activity occurring within that framework.

Assumption. An assumption, according to Webster (1982), is anything taken for granted, a presumption. Assumptions are thought to act on our behavior in unconscious ways. That is, our behavior is driven by that which we believe to be true, but those beliefs--assumptions--are not in our conscious awareness as we make choices about what we do, think, and feel. A set, or several sets, of related assumptions, then, comprise a paradigm.

It will be frequently noted here that there is strong evidence to support the unconscious property of assumptions. This evidence is in the form of negative evidence. That is, there isn't any. It was extremely difficult to locate in the literature any discussion or articulation of a given discipline's assumptions. Only at the epistemological level does there seem to be any acknowledgement that assumptions are critical to whatever theories or activities might rest on them.

Holism. Holism and systems theory are closely related concepts in that they each state in similar words that any whole is much greater than the sum of its component parts, and that each

variable in the whole or system interacts in such a way that cause and effect cannot be separated (Ferguson, 1980). Webster states that holism is "the view that an integrated whole has a reality independent of and greater than the sum of its parts" (1982, p. 668). Ferguson reports that most scientists involved in the general inquiry of the new science agree that a holistic view not only raises serious questions about the traditional scientific method, but also makes clear that "wholes cannot be understood by analysis" (p.156).

This, of course, presents a problem. In order to create any holistic model one must, by necessity, examine and analyze the component parts of the model. And so, for the purposes of this paper, it is my intention to fly in the face of the very definition of holism and proceed not only to examine component parts but also to suggest a model that rests in a new HRD paradigm.

Human Resource Development. In the American Society for Training and Development "ASTD Models of Excellence Study" (1988), HRD is defined as "the integrated use of a) training and development, b) organization development, and c) career development to improve individual, group and organizational effectiveness" (p. 27). ASTD goes on to say that the primary focus of HRD is development. On a simple level, states Patricia McLagan (1989), HRD is "the process of increasing the capacity of the human resource through development" (p. 52). Organizations, she states, need to be more attentive to human resource issues in the changing, competitive market.

Marquardt and Engel (1993) define HRD as "the art and science of empowering people and organizations to create maximum productivity, quality, opportunity, and fulfillment as they work to achieve common goals" (p. xii). They state that HRD "can include anything from a single training activity to entire systems for achieving strategic goals within an organization" (p. 8). They point out that HRD is a dynamic field drawing upon several disciplines: education, management science, psychology, communication, economics, organization behavior, philosophy, and sociology. The multi-disciplinary basis alone demonstrates the complexity of assumptions that drive the practice of HRD.

Gilley and Eggland (1989) address the serious nature of global competition as the impetus behind management's increased emphasis on human performance. They define HRD as "organized learning activities arranged within an organization in order to improve performance and/or personal growth for the purpose of improving the job, the individual, and/or the organization" (p. 5). They also state that the purpose of HRD is to "bring about the changes that cause the performance improvements that will ultimately enhance the organization" (p. 13).

While these definitions are not exhaustive, they guide the following discussion. A full examination of the current paradigm in which Human Resource Development operates would be, of course, nothing less than an in-depth review of a rather large body of literature. I do not intend to do that here. I will, however, present a few of the most basic assumptions underlying the practice of HRD. These assumptions are often stated in terms of definitions, as discussed earlier, or in terms of philosophy, principles,

purposes, and mission of the field.

The Current Human Resource Development Paradigm

The process of examining the assumptions of the current HRD paradigm is an investigation into several sources. First, the body of scholarly literature reflects a sizeable effort to look for and find answers to human resource questions and problems. Second, the amount of popular literature in HRD and related fields in growing exponentially each year. For example, the writings of Senge, Covey, and Hammer have dominated recent best-seller lists for months.

However, the literature on HRD does not explicitly state the assumptions, as such, that underlie the field. The implicit assumptions have been difficult to articulate, and it should be noted that the reporting of implicit assumptions determined herein could reflect a number of biases, even though attempts have been made to keep those biases to a minimum.

The three theoretical bodies that support HRD are systems theory, psychology, and economics (Swanson, 1981), and each of these disciplines brings with it its own set of assumptions. For example, general systems theory states that a system is "a collection of interdependent, organized parts that work together in an environment to achieve the purpose of the whole" (McLagan, 1989, p. 66). McLagan states that as a response to growing complexity in the world, systems theory provides the HRD profession with tools for determining hierarchies of systems, descriptions of systems components, and descriptions of systems processes.

The key concepts in systems theory are "parts, whole, environment, purpose, interdependent, and organized" (McLagan, 1989, p. 66). One assumption is that the parts and the whole must work together for a purpose. McLagan states that purpose, being agreed to and chosen by individuals in social systems, is a key process in organizations. Interdependence assumes that "the behavior of parts of the system affect other parts and the system as a whole" (p. 67). The concept, "organized," implies that parts of a system are not the product of random acts.

The combined concepts of "purpose" and "organized" appear to assume that individuals consciously and intentionally act "at cause" (as opposed to "at the effect of"). In other words, it is assumed that individuals possess the free will to make conscious choices about their behavior.

The discipline and practice of psychology is also concerned with human behavior, and influences the paradigm of HRD practice in many ways. With roots in a diverse array of other disciplines--philosophy and the natural sciences, for example--present day psychology is broad in its scope. Breadth aside, the goal of all research in psychology is to explain human behavior by focusing on the individual (Carlson, 1984). Psychology views individuals in terms of biology and development, mental system, behavior, the influence of society and the environment, and the range of possible experience.

Perhaps the most significant assumptions that can be gleaned from psychology come from its research methodology. The scientific

method predominates over other methods of inquiry, and its assumptions are numerous and distinct (Smith & Glass, 1987). Primarily, the scientific method assumes that reality is an objective entity "out there" somewhere waiting to be discovered. The role of the researcher is objective and does not affect that which is being studied. The goal of research, to predict behavior, is accomplished by testing hypotheses with outcomes expressed statistically. Almost the entire discipline of psychology rests on these assumptions.

Economic theory also contributes significant assumptions to the current HRD paradigm. It is a social science concerned with "the way society employs its limited resources...to produce goods and services for present and future consumption" (Spencer, 1990, p. 2). It assumes that human behavior can be explained, in part, by the interactions of buying, selling, producing, and consuming. It also assumes scarcity; that is, material and human resources are limited in the sense that people want more goods and services than can be produced.

The concept of scarcity as it relates to economic theory is rich in assumptions. As economists illustrate, time is a scarce commodity. This is assuming, of course, the Western paradigm of time in which time is an external force to be reckoned with, as opposed to the creation view of time. For example, if a group of people are sitting around watching the clouds, we might say here in the West that they are wasting time; but in the plains of Africa, it might be said that they are creating time (Ember & Ember, 1977).

These three bodies of theory might very well be the most basic layer of assumptions under the practice of HRD. They, in turn, form the base for a second layer of assumptions found in the core concepts of the field.

In examining the definitions presented in the previous section, there are several common threads throughout. It seems to be agreed upon that HRD is a specific practice, distinct from other professional practice by its theoretical base and boundary of application. It is an integrated process of improving human capacity for performance. Its focus is on development, and its approach is multidisciplinary. The practice is carried out by trained and educated individuals who possess a body of knowledge enabling them to teach, train, facilitate, or otherwise produce changes in others.

Inherent in these concepts are several assumptions: 1) human beings have the capacity to learn and grow; 2) human beings working in organizations want and need to learn; 3) organizations want and need to develop their members; 4) organized learning activities are the primary tools in the application of HRD; 5) change occurs incrementally through deliberate action-based activities; 6) the impetus for change lies external to the individual and the organization; 7) certain individuals (HRD professionals) are best suited to stimulate and produce change in others; and 8) the HRD profession is committed to finding answers to organizational problems.

Also present in every definition of HRD is perhaps one of the most basic of assumptions underlying organizations, particularly those in the Western world and the global market: the notion of

competition. The American economy is based on the principle that we may freely compete with one another for profit. The paradigm of competition, needless to say, is the common denominator of American life, as manifested not only in commerce but also in academia, sports, interpersonal relationships, and every other facet of our social lives.

Scientific Impetus for Paradigm Shifts

History demonstrates the way in which human construction of social institutions takes its lead from scientific explanations of reality. Whether or not it is intentional, we have constructed our worldview or paradigm from the natural sciences (Bohm, 1980, Capra, 1975; Wheatley, 1992).

In the past two centuries, the Newtonian scientific paradigm has dictated, among other things, organization behavior. In 1980, physicist David Bohm explained that Newtonian mechanistic science viewed the world as being constituted on separate and unchangeable "building blocks" (p. 173). In Wheatley's Leadership and the New Science (1992), she writes that "We manage [our organizations] by separating things into parts, we believe that influence occurs as direct result of force exerted from one person to another, we engage in complex planning for a world that we keep expecting to be predictable, and we search continually for better methods of objectively perceiving the world" (p. 6). These assumptions, from Newtonian mechanistic science, are from the 17th century.

Science today, however, has changed. In the past few decades, revolutionary discoveries in biology, chemistry, and physics are challenging our fundamental worldview or paradigm. Quantum physics, chaos theory, and the theory of self-organizing (dissipative) structures comprise the core of twentieth century science (Ferguson, 1980; Prigogine, 1984; Wheatley, 1992). While painfully complex and beyond my rational threshold of understanding, it can be stated that the essence of the new science sees the universe as being an undivided whole. Bohm (1980) stated that "to begin with undivided wholeness means, however, that we must drop the mechanistic order" (p. 176). As Wheatley (1992) cautions, we need to "ground our work in the science of the times" (p. 6).

Exactly what does this new science tell us about ourselves? If we were to extract a single major breakthrough from new science it would be the notion of wholeness and connectedness of all things in the universe (Bohm, 1980; Capra, 1975; Ferguson, 1980; Wheatley, 1992). This new science paradigm reflects a reality beyond the world of ordinary sense-perception which involves spaces of higher dimensions and transcends ordinary language and logical reasoning (Capra, 1975).

Ferguson (1980) states that to fully realize the extent to which new science transcends ordinary logic, one need only visit "the never-never land of quantum physics or the parapsychology laboratories" (p. 170). To consider psychic phenomena in 1993 is still viewed as unreasonable, even with the concrete evidence staring us in the face. It is the perfect example of the difficulty experienced while standing in one paradigm trying to understand

another. To illustrate this shift, the everyday statement "I'll believe it when I see it" has moved to "I'll see it when I believe it."

As discussed in the following section, there is growing evidence that the new paradigm in science is creeping into other arenas of human activity and exerting its influence. In fact, there is ample evidence that a paradigm shift has already begun in many areas of social life. The implications for the practice of human resource development lie in the fundamental assumptions about human interactions that make up this new paradigm.

Moving Closer to a Paradigm Shift

In 1980, Marilyn Ferguson's highly popular Aquarian Conspiracy chronicled the growth and development of a wide network of individuals and organizations whose intention was to bring about radical change in the American culture. The conspirators, she wrote, were creating a new mind, a new paradigm, that would affect every facet of our lives. The assumptions underlying this movement represented a significant shift from the well-worn paradigm of tradition to belief-challenging ways of constructing human behavior. And some of the central assumptions of this new transformative process are rooted in holism and systems theory.

As discussed earlier, one of the central assumptions of this new paradigm is the interconnectedness of the universe and, as such, the various parts of the system must work in concert with each other for the good of the whole. However, our present model of competition does not fit within this new paradigm.

There are, in fact, individuals in various spheres who are challenging the assumption of competition; and in the past decade, their numbers are on the rise. Alfie Kohn (1986) makes a strong case against competition in No Contest when he refutes the arguments that competition is inevitable, more productive, more enjoyable, and builds character. He argues that "a competitive economic system offers itself as the best way to deal with scarcity while quietly promoting scarcity" (p. 74). He more than strongly suggests that competition contributes to an inequitable distribution of resources.

Further evidence of this paradigm shift occurring in the world of business and industry is from Peter Block, who in Stewardship (1993), states that "unless there is also a shift in governance, namely, how we distribute power, and privilege, and the control of money, the [organizational change] efforts will be more cosmetic than enduring" (p. xix). He is demanding a quantum change in our worldview regarding power, privilege, and money--no small dimensions in how we structure our lives.

The central premise of Block's notion of Stewardship centers on the concept of service. It is "accountability without control or compliance" (p. xx). The true meaning of service, in my view, in a foreign concept in societies structured around a patriarchal, competitive economy. In such an economy, self-interest is the primary motivator. Service, on the other hand, springs from quite different assumptions. The values inherent in service favor sharing over greed, autonomy over hierarchy, cooperation over competition,

and collectivism over individualism (Ferguson, 1980). Another guru of present day organizational transformation states that "if economists understood the theory of a system, and the role of cooperation in optimization, they would no longer teach and preach salvation through adversarial competition" (Deming, 1993, p. 75). He advocates throwing out the idea that competition is a necessary way of life, and recommends replacing it with cooperation.
George Land and Beth Jarman (1992) use examples from science, nature, and business to illustrate the ways in which millions of people are contributing to major change in Breakpoint and Beyond. They refer to the human breakpoint as that which "requires us to change our basic thinking patterns and alter our worldview" (p. 9). They define worldview as shared assumptions about how the world works. They make an argument for dramatic shifts in the way business operates, using the creative process as a primary tool.

In The Fourth Wave (1993), Maynard and Mehrtens identify a wave for business in the 21st century that appears to be inevitable. They identify several trends that contribute to a paradigm shift in business and industry. Like Block, they contend that a major shift in consciousness is upon us. They state that "increasing numbers of people around the world are concluding that consciousness is primary, that the mind or spirit has a reality comparable to material objects" (p. 2). They, too, place emphasis on interconnectedness and wholeness, and suggest that the role for business is global stewardship.

The waves of change, a concept from Alvin Toffler, refer to the major revolutions profoundly affecting human life. Toffler's third wave referred to balance and sustainability, connectedness and cooperation. Maynard and Mehrtens predict that the worldview of the fourth wave is "We are one and choose to cocreate" (p.6). They observe that most corporations today are second wave--"we are separate and must compete"--as evidenced by hierarchical structures and values like profit, efficiency, and growth. They are clear that the competitive model of organizations is going to be replaced by a cooperative model with congruent values.

In addition to the challenge to competition, there are other indications that a paradigm shift is underway. Joining Block, Senge, Maynard and Mehrtens, and Covey in presenting new ideas about organizational transformation are Warren Bennis, George Land, Willis Harman, Michael Ray, Marjorie Kelly and others who have made significant contributions to a new paradigm in business (Ray & Rinzler, 1993).

As members of the World Business Academy, these individuals believe that of all social institutions, "only business has the power to facilitate solutions" (p. xi) to the overwhelming challenges facing the world today. They believe that the "business of business is to be responsible for the whole of creation, for the well-being of the earth and all its creatures" (p.xiii). This does not sound like the voice of business, particularly when standing in the traditional business paradigm.

However foreign sounding these new concepts may be, the shift, like change, is inevitable. The bad news about change is that it takes time--lots of time. After all, it took about a century for Copernicus's ideas to have an effect. He was the fellow who created

a major paradigm shift when he postulated that the earth was not the center of the known universe.

The good news is that it appears there is a paradigm shift underway. There are several assumptions to this new paradigm that have already been articulated by others. And these assumptions most certainly can apply to the practice of human resource development. To contribute to this evolving paradigm, I would like to propose some assumptions of my own.

Alternative Assumptions for a Holistic HRD Model

It is evident that the traditional, world of agreement paradigm of the practice of human resource development has thus far included a commitment to finding answers to organizational problems. The assumption here is that there is an answer to every problem and the task or function of HRD is to find the right one.

In a new evolving paradigm of HRD I would like to propose a shift from answers to questions as a problem solving model. The commitment, focus, emphasis and priority would be placed on the asking of the questions, the right questions, and not on finding the answers. "Answers" would occur, of course, but they would be viewed more as transient and temporary rather than final and lasting. While the distinction may at first be seen as semantic, the shift would become manifest in the degree to which we become attached to what we perceive as being "right."

A commitment to asking the right questions would also facilitate the creative process. The power of a question partially lies in the lifting of limits inherent in answers. That is, when we find the answer to a problem, we stop any activity related to it. The right/wrong nature of answers often inhibits further inquiry. By remaining focused on the questions surrounding a problem, we are willing to seek and find any number of answers as solutions. For example, it might be more powerful for an organization to create not a mission statement, but a mission question.

In this example, the emphasis on the question is more process oriented, as opposed to the destination orientation of answers. An organization is more likely to experience greater creativity by remaining committed to a mission question that if it were locked in to a final-form statement.

A second suggested assumption in the new HRD paradigm concerns cooperation as mode of human interaction. By exchanging the competitive model of commerce for a cooperative one, we would be keeping in alignment with the newly emerged scientific paradigm. This shift will eventually occur, so we might as well implement it now.

Individuals and organizations are at the cause of their experience is a third assumption for the new HRD paradigm. This means that human beings create their own experience, as opposed to being at the mercy of their environment. This assumption requires a bit of a leap. It basically views individuals as accountable, not as victims.

A fourth assumption refers to the responsibility for the

growth and development of individuals within organizations. It is part of the current HRD paradigm that development of individuals is critical to the overall success of an organization. However, the emphasis is on how, by developing the individual, the organization will benefit. The suggested assumption in the new paradigm shifts the benefit from the organization alone to both the organization and the individual. A related assumption is that by both benefitting, the net gain is greater than the sum of separate gains.

A final assumption of the new HRD paradigm concerns the view of success. In its most global form, the assumption is: success is reached when the world works for everyone and everything with nothing and no one left out. In related assumptions, we assume that no one wins unless everyone wins. All human activity would have at its focus the success of everyone.

Conclusion

Patricia McLagan states that the workplace is "a context for managing and developing people that will require new assumptions, styles, and skills from everyone who does HRD work" (1989, p. 49). I agree with her. I wonder, though, if she had anything quite so radical in mind when she said this.

In this paper I have attempted to describe the current paradigm of HRD practice as well as document a shift that is already underway. In addition, I have proposed some assumptions of my own to add to the new paradigm, the "question" assumption being original.

As I discussed earlier, the difficulty in considering and discussing paradigm shifts lies in our language, both verbal and mental. Because we are thinking, feeling, and speaking from one paradigm, addressing the assumptions, concerns, and issues of a different paradigm often makes no sense at all. If, by chance, we happen to grasp the concepts of the new and different paradigm, we still have difficulty transposing the implications of it into our current lives. Perhaps critical mass will occur in my lifetime and I will be here to see it!

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Designing Action Reflection Learning Research: Balancing Research Needs Against Real-World Constraints

ARL™ Inquiry[1]

Boundary management is a challenge in all forms of participant observation. Here we explore considerations that we believe are unique to research on Action Reflection Learning™ programs in which the role of the researcher bears similarity to a key purpose of the program itself, that is, reflection from an outsider's perspective. We describe the program researched and the research design, as both intended and actually implemented. We then look at boundary management issues and their implications.

This paper shares reflections upon an evolving research design through which we seek to understand the dynamics and outcomes of Action Reflection Learning™ (ARL) programs. ARL is an executive development intervention that is linked to organizational change outcomes. It is designed around learning theory that features an iterative process of action and reflection. In this paper we will first describe ARL as a concept, and then characterize the specific company program that is being researched. We present the "ideal" research strategy we created. We then describe the way in which real world constraints forced us to modify our design. We examine the dilemmas of boundary management experienced in the new research design, and conclude with reflections on lessons learned with respect to the next phase of the research.

What is Action Reflection Learning™?

Action Reflection Learning™ is a form of Action Learning (AL) practiced by Leadership in International Management Ltd. (LIM). Action learning draws its theoretical base from Reg Revans (1982), a British physicist, considered to be the originator of AL. McGill & Beaty (1992) present a working definition:

> Action learning is a continuous process of learning and reflection, supported by colleagues, with an intention of getting things done. Through action learning individuals learn with and from each other by working on real problems and reflecting on their own experiences. The process helps us to take an active stance toward life and helps to overcome the tendency to think, feel and be passive toward the pressures of life. (p. 17)

One of the main differences between ARL and AL is that there needs to be a dual emphasis in ARL on both learning and doing, with the understanding that people do not always know how to learn as a product of their experience. So the process of reflection, particularly critical reflection, plays a more crucial role than may have been originally conceived by Revans (O'Neil & Marsick, 1994).

In a typical ARL program small teams focus on strategically driven business questions. The teams meet during four, one week residential sessions held over a six to nine month period. During these week-long sessions the members of the four teams also meet periodically as a total community. During these community meetings participants engage in various learning activities. They also participate in reflection and dialogue sessions. In addition to the four residential

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[1] ARL™ Inquiry is a research group affiliated with Leadership in International Management Ltd. All authors are members of ARL™ Inquiry . Lyle Yorks and Glenn Nilson, Eastern Connecticut State University, took leadership for this article based on data collected by Lyle Yorks and jointly analyzed for this article with the following LIM members, listed in alphabetical order: Robert Kolodny, Adjunct, New School for Social Research; Victoria J. Marsick, Teachers College, Columbia University; Judy O'Neil, Adjunct, Teachers College, Columbia University.

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sessions, teams schedule working time between program meetings as needed for project work.

Three critical roles in an ARL program are the Program Director, Program Staff and the Program Assistant. The Program Director is responsible for overseeing the entire program and is accountable for its successful implementation. The Program Assistant handles logistics and coordinates arrangements for the program. Both participate as members of the total learning community. The Program Staff role is called a Project Team Advisor or PTA. The PTA's work with The Program Director to design the program and work throughout the program with project teams.

During the program PTAs lead the sessions, and through interventions challenge the assumptions of the participants and encourage them to challenge one another in terms of both their ideas and actions and the norms of the organization. Many of these interventions take the form of questions. Through these questions, participants are helped to make the implicit, explicit, and to surface what is usually undiscussable. Many of these questions are raised at critical points during team meetings in order to help the team recognize and confront dysfunctional group behavior and to encourage reflection when the team appears ready to act prematurely.

Beyond this, the PTA models critical reflection—reflection on the tacit, taken-for-granted assumptions that must be examined for people to reframe problems (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). Project teams almost always reframe the problems on which they work because they are not to focus their efforts solely on analysis; they also experiment with solutions, and in so doing, test their understanding of the problems and encounter feedback about the consequences of proposed changes from the entire system. Feedback leads teams to rethinking their understanding of the project problem as originally framed.

The ARL Program Being Studied

The study being reported here is taking place in a large, multi-national divisional company that is using ARL as a means of developing managers so that the company can transform itself into a global network organization. Management has determined that to remain competitive the company must function as a global organization, mirroring what is happening to many of its large customers. A 1992 corporate culture survey identified seven areas that needed to be addressed in order to enhance the ability of the organization to perform effectively as a global organization—teamwork, employee development, trust, leadership communications, conflict management, innovation and change. Three programs were scheduled to be held, each comprised of twenty senior level managers selected from various parts of the world wide organization. These twenty participants were divided into four project teams. Our research began with the second program and will continue with the third program. This paper reports observations of the second program.

The second program began in May 1994 with a residential week held in the Northeastern United States and concluded with the fourth residential week held in a Northeast seaside resort in October 1994. In between, the program met as a total community for two additional residential weeks: the second meeting in a resort hotel in Southern France, and the third week in an urban Asian city at the end of August. Additionally the four project teams pursued work on their projects throughout the intervening weeks. These project teams were global in composition. Each team worked on a project of strategic importance to the organization that was sponsored by a member of the company's Executive Committee. Each team had to provide a recommendation for its project, that had been in some way partially tested for implementation, at the end of the fourth residential week. This recommendation was made in a presentation to the entire program community and the Executive Committee.

Designing the Research: What Was Intended

This research has some non-traditional origins, one being that it was initiated by a consulting organization that essentially wanted to research itself relative to its work with clients. To initiate that research it was necessary to get client organizations to sponsor the activity and to establish a research team that could be independent of LIM while being sympathetic to its over

all goals. Eventually two university based researchers with no links to LIM (one of which is the field researcher described below) were invited to join a research group led by a university based researcher who is a LIM partner and two other members of the LIM staff not involved with the program to be researched. This group has designated itself the ARL™ Inquiry. The role of this group continues to evolve as the research goes forward.

ARL™ Inquiry's goal has been to create an umbrella research strategy so that LIM can research different features of its technology in different companies, but could still strive toward the creation of a data base with some uniformity of focus and data. We intend to eventually develop grounded theory concerning the dynamics of ARL programs and their impact on organizations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Because LIM works with many clients, we expect that findings from this exploratory research will generate insights that, while tied most directly to the program studied, will also lead to toward the ultimate goal of generating middle-range substantive theory as the research is extended to subsequent programs in other companies.

We proposed to the company in question a research design that could be carried out at either of three, increasingly complex levels. We describe these levels here, but it is important to keep in mind that these levels illustrate what we proposed; what was actually agreed to is described in the next section of this paper.

Level one would focus primarily on each program: developing an understanding of strategic business issues embedded in the projects, examining the immediate impact on participating managers, and providing feedback about program design. Our hope was that four participant observers would be involved. Each would observe a team, taking field notes and conducting interviews.

Level two would include the above, and in addition, more effort would be made to collect data from people with whom the participants directly interact. If possible, ARL teams would videotape sessions, the teams would then participate in fishbowl sessions along with PTAs to feed back insights, which could then be discussed by participants—with the caveat that team members would retain the right to decide which segments would be used in this fashion. Focal questions would be posed to both participants and PTAs to generate deeper insights. In short, level two implied that the observations and insights "in progress" would become part of the program design to enhance the quality of reflection and learning.

Level two would integrate the research role more fully into the ARL process. We were aware that this would impact the experience of the program. However, even with a level one design, the research role was likely to have some influence on the program. ARL programs build close-knit learning communities that are learning laboratories; the presence of participant observers would be highly noticeable. We expected that program staff would have to build in some opportunities for the researchers to share their reflections with staff and participants. We knew this posed risks that needed managing so that generating valid information could be balanced against learning design needs. In either levels one or two, decisions about including information shared by the researcher with the staff for reflection in the total program community (participants, Program Director, Staff, and Program Assistant) would be made jointly.

Level three would address both levels one and two, and in addition, examine the longer-range impact on both managers and the company, as well as changes in the company's perception of itself as a global business or as a learning organization. Participants would be interviewed at selected points over time. Interviews would also be conducted with other people in the organization in order to document the extent of transfer of learning into the organization and the impact of project recommendations.

What was Agreed to by the Company

The company was well aware that many sensitivities had been generated by the first program. ARL programs are very time consuming for participants, and others in the organization must often pick up some of their workload. Recommendations from the teams generate additional work as they move into the implementation phase. The company president did not want to place more stress on the time demands of people in the organization. Additionally, the human resources director, who was also functioning as an internal Program Director, did not want to upset the effectiveness of the design of the program.

The research role was an unknown influence. The program staff was enthusiastic about the research, with LIM offering to underwrite part of the expense. After much discussion, the president and the Program Director did agree to the negotiated entry of one participant observer in order to allow observation and still safeguard against any likelihood that the research process would contaminate the program. Furthermore, this single observer was to fit into the program by occasionally being invited by the PTAs to share his observations with the group. The Program Director also required that participants be asked, at the end of the first weekly seminar, whether or not the researcher's participation was intrusive. It was agreed that the researcher would only continue with the program beyond the first residential week if it was okay with the participants.

The Role of the Researcher

At the end of the first residential week, the field worker had gained the confidence of participants and the Program Director, and hence was given permission to stay for the rest of the program. However, he kept a low research profile. He interacted informally with participants and the PTAs and the Program Director during the week-long events. On an opportunistic basis, he informally interviewed participants. He also observed project teams on a rotating basis and many of the program's other events, took field notes and wrote up his reflections. Along the continuum ranging from full participation to detached observation (Gold, 1958), the field researcher structured his activity as an observer-participant. Part of the agreement was that he would not typically comment as part of the program process unless invited to do so by the PTAs. However, as will become clear below, there were certain activities that necessitated his authentic participation as a member of the total program community and not as a researcher. Otherwise, he could not build and sustain a relationship with the group and would exist only as an alien presence.

At the end of each week-long segment, the field worker wrote up a summary of his insights. He then met separately with the Program Director to give him feedback. These observations were also shared with the PTAs. He also met with the other four members of the ARL™ Inquiry team who acted as a sounding board throughout the research. During these meetings the researcher would share his observations and the members of the inquiry team raised questions and made suggestions. The ARL™ Inquiry team is in the process of doing a content analysis of the data collected from this first phase of the study.

As he gained the Program Director's confidence, the field researcher was also allowed to conduct interviews with non-participants in the organization who were impacted by the program. He also participated in a team-building skills meeting in Holland held as one of the outcomes of a project from the first ARL program. The purpose of his participation was to gain more insight into the role of the PTA and to interact with people within the company to gain more data on how the ARL program was impacting the organization. For purposes of this meeting the field researcher adopted more of a participant observer role, as opposed to an observer participant role. This involvement reflected an increased level of comfort with the researcher on the part of the human resources director. The research role is thus being gradually extended beyond observation of the program itself.

What We Learned: Dilemmas of Boundary Management When Conducting Field Research on ARL Programs.

The remainder of this paper discusses the dilemmas and choices that had to be made by the field researcher within the context of the dynamic ARL program. The dilemmas of participant observation have been well documented (cf. Whyte, 1984). Our focus here is on the choices that confront the field worker in a very unusual field setting—a dynamic learning community that has been explicitly established for purposes of facilitating personal development and transformational organization change. ARL programs are designed to flexibly accommodate emerging interests; hence the field researcher became part of a web of complex interactions as feedback and observation were reflected upon by four different interest groups: the ARL program participants, the PTAs, the Program Director (also the human resources director), and the ARL™ Inquiry team.

Boundaries with Participants The researcher had to manage several boundaries. The boundary between himself and the participants was critical. The field researcher had to become sufficiently integrated into the program to be able to talk freely with participants at appropriate times, yet maintain a distance that kept him on the periphery of what was happening. The ability to talk freely with participants was a fundamental requirement for the research. As Whyte (1984) notes, it is not possible to reliably ascribe the meaning that people attach to events simply from observing their behavior or even listening to their verbal interaction.

Early in the program this boundary was a moving target that tested the researcher's judgment as he tried to aim at the right balance between integration and distance. As the project teams began forming and the group of twenty participants became a learning community, what was a collection of individuals emerged as an increasingly cohesive group with its own identity. The boundary defining the group was forming, and, at the same time changing, and it was important for the field researcher to establish his role within it or be left outside the emerging community. If the researcher moved outside the periphery of the boundary, he would be an outside intrusion, perhaps viewed suspiciously by participants, and in any event, he might be cut off from the kind of interaction that would permit reliable interpretation of the meaning of what he was observing. The researcher could not remain a stranger, or something of an enigma, and succeed in his research role. If the participants did not accept the researcher and the research role as a legitimate part of the learning community, even promises of confidentiality would not lead to open and frank sharing of meaning from the participants to the researcher. As Wax (1971) has written, "most sensible people do not believe what a stranger tells them" (p. 365). Additionally, the researcher's presence would most likely become a distraction, and possibly an impediment for the program. On the other hand, should the researcher move too far inside the boundary between himself and the participants, he would become too much a part of the story he was recording and intrude on another boundary—the staff would very likely come to see him as an unwelcome "loose canon" intruding on their territory.

In establishing this role the support of both the Program Director and PTAs was critical. At certain points in the program the PTAs would invite the researcher to share his observations of what had just occurred. Usually this took place as part of a stop and reflect intervention in the project teams[2]. At these times the researcher would briefly share some of the process observations he had made while observing the group. These would be descriptively given in a manner calculated to be helpful. Participants responded to these observations positively, and they provided the foundation for establishing a relationship between researcher and participants.

During the evening of the group's arrival for the first residential week, the researcher described his role to the participants as seeking to better understand the dynamics of the program as a learning process in order to help facilitate the design of such programs going forward. One of the PTAs described this role to the group as taking the "helicopter" view. Somewhat fortuitously, the next night the Program Director asked if "sky watch" had any comments following the evening activity. This nick-name was picked up by a couple of the participants and "sky" became his identity within the group. Having a metaphor name that described and legitimated the research role, while carrying a humorous connotation, was very helpful in integrating the researcher into the community. As the program progressed the participants became accustomed to the researcher's role, sometimes joking that "Sky isn't allowed to say anything until the end of the week." This comment was in reference to the practice of the field researcher sharing a summary of his observations following lunch on Saturday as each residential week was drawing to a close. These observations would take three to five minutes and would be directed toward the overall patterns of learning and group dynamics in the community. They would be stated as reflections on the process.

Despite their emergent familiarity with the research role, many participants continued to see the researcher as a member of the program staff, sometimes describing him as a "spare" PTA. At times participants would invite him to play such a role, and he would have to suggest that the question was best referred to the PTA. Still, judgments had to be made. For example, once a participant approached the researcher following a project team meeting the researcher had observed and, at the invitation of the PTA, had made a few observations during the "stop and

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[2] The "stop and reflect" is a regular feature of ARL programs. Participants "stop" the work they are doing to "reflect," individually and as a group, on what they learned about themselves, the project work, and their interaction as a learning group.

reflect." The participant was struggling with changing certain of his actions in the group which he believed were counter productive and he wanted the researcher's thoughts. The researcher made the judgment that to decline would be jeopardize his position as a member of the community. Consequently, the two had a brief discussion around the participant's question, although the researcher avoided any hint of establishing a coaching relationship. Such interventions were occasionally necessary, but had to be kept to a minimum.

The researcher did not depend on a set of informants, a practice often used in field research (Jorgensen, 1989; Whyte, 1984). It would have been easy for him to succumb to the temptation of cultivating a special relationship with a select set of participants whom the researcher found to be especially helpful and insightful. In such a small community, in which the development of trust was being emphasized, the establishment of such relationships would run the risk of being a dysfunctional intrusion, and in the researcher's judgment, possibly unethical. Of course, some participants were more insightful than others, but the researcher worked to maintain his relationship with all of the participants. Interviews were conducted when the opportunity presented itself or when certain comments or events required more understanding. The two examples below illustrate how these opportunistic interviews were often triggered.

It is part of the program design to begin several of the mornings during the residential weeks with a period of reflection and dialogue that typically extend for 45 minutes in length. All members of the community, including the researcher, would sit with their chairs in a large circle. Following five minutes of reflection, people would voluntarily share any of their thoughts. At the beginning of the second week, one participant stated the following:

> When I left the first week I was very unrealistic. I tried to be more aware (of what was happening in the organization). . . . (This) led to frustration, I saw stuff in the organization (pause) . . . . I came in (here) with a bad attitude. My (project) group turned it around. I want to say thanks to my group. (Quote recorded in field notes, July 11, 1994)

The researcher did not follow up on this comment immediately following the reflection and dialogue period, but noted it. During an afternoon break on Thursday, he approached the person who made the reflection and asked whether or not he could explore the comment. The two sat down and had a fifteen minute "opportunistic interview," the substance of which was recorded immediately afterward in his field notes.

In a second example, during a mid-week dialogue in the third residential week, the group was reflecting on an issue sensitive to the entire community—trust. One of the participants said, ". . . what has struck me is that (the company) is a very gossipy culture." That evening the researcher asked the participant about the comment. The two went to a quiet area and talked for forty minutes. This same incident provided rich observation-based data as well. The dialogue was conducted because the staff had become aware of the issue, which was manifested as an undercurrent pointing to a lack of trust on the part of some participants. The dialogue evolved into a very powerful exchange on how the program participants were functioning as a group. This seems to have been a watershed moment for the program. What had been an undiscussable was brought out into the open in a way that seemed beyond the experience of most of the participants. To the observer, who was not embedded in either the dialogue or the issue, it seemed that the ARL process had permitted the culture of the host organization to reproduce itself within the dialogue circle where it could be discussed. The question that was begging to be addressed "how do we use where we are as a group to change the company's culture." The group was struggling with norms around information sharing and trust, and with the question of who guards the norms.

Boundaries with PTAs Another boundary was between the researcher and the staff. The researcher had to avoid becoming too close to the staff as well. As the program progressed a professional bond formed between the Program Director, the staff, and researcher. As this comfort level grew the researcher had to remind himself not to identify with the PTAs, but to remain centered in his role. As an experienced consultant, he had to avoid the temptation to insert himself into the process as he became a part of the community. This temptation was great since, as an observer, he could often see things that he might have missed if more immersed in the process. He only made comments during the program when invited by the PTAs. Once, a member of one of the project teams that was recommending a change in the structure of the company approached the researcher with an invitation to critique their recommendation. "You teach organizational theory, and consult on organizational design, right?" he asked. "We are looking for outside feedback. Why don't you give us your thoughts." The researcher had observed much of

their discussion and did have concerns. But to voice them would be to fundamentally change his relationship with the process. The offer was declined saying, "given the implications of your recommendations, and my responsibilities as a researcher, it would be inappropriate for me to engage in that discussion."

Maintaining the boundary between the researcher and the PTAs was complicated by the agreement that he would write up and share his observations with the Program Director and the PTAs between residential sessions. These observations were talked through in detail with the Program Director and at least one of the PTAs and were taken into consideration going forward. This input was one of the justifications for the company undertaking the cost of the research. The PTAs would also periodically seek his observations during the course of casual conversation during the residential weeks. Once, over dinner in France, one of the PTAs asked, "What do you think? Will we see any storming this week?" "I think you are more likely to see some storming against the staff," the researcher replied, sharing a certain undercurrent he thought he had observed. This became a topic of conversation.[3] Such conversations and dialogues, however, provided a basis for a growing professional bond. The researcher wanted the research role to be useful, but had to avoid becoming central to the staff's activities.

Boundaries with the Program Director The researcher interacted with the Program Director in several roles. First, he was the key client contact for LIM. The researcher had to be mindful of the client-consultant contract in providing reports to the organization about the research function. The researcher had a special relationship to the Program Director within the program because, in that capacity, he also wore multiple hats. Trained in organization development, he had decided to function as a PTA during this second program. He was, as previously mentioned, the human resources director with responsibilities, as well, for organization development. Wearing these three hats proved to be complicated. As time went on, the other staff were becoming convinced he should not continue as a PTA in future programs. He was not convinced. The discussion was ongoing. At one point, over a Saturday night dinner during the second week of seminars, the Program Director suddenly turned to the researcher and asked, "What do you think?" Immediately, the researcher was thrust inside the boundary between the staff and the program director. At first, the field worker said "I am just an observer." "What the hell does that mean?" came the reply. The researcher gave his observations on the issues involved honestly, but avoided any subsequent involvement in this policy decision. As the Program Director and staff became comfortable with the researcher, other issues that would potentially place the researcher inside the boundary between the other two parties had to be quickly recognized and resolved, usually through discussion, sometimes through simple avoidance.

Managing these various boundaries required that the researcher be constantly making decisions. One of the most recurrent of these choices centered around when to be taking notes. Most of the time he took notes, a practice made easier because the PTAs frequently did so as well. The days were long and the volume of potential data so great that one could not rely solely on recall, even a few hours later. However, almost every text on field work notes that such research requires a good memory—the ability to hold key events and verbal commentary in one's mind until one can record them later in field notes (Fetterman, 1989; Whyte, 1984). That ability was necessary as well. There were instances where taking notes had the potential, it seemed, to make people uncomfortable and perhaps alter what they might say. At other times, taking notes might separate the researcher from the group in to visible a way.

An example of the former is the dialogue described above that took place around trust during the third week of the program. The researcher did not take any notes during this 45 minute dialogue, even though it was clear that this was an important event in the group's development as a learning community. He did not want to risk causing someone to not participate because of the note taking, nor to risk distracting people from the dialogue which was intense. Immediately following the session, he went to a quiet spot and spent the next hour reconstructing the event in his field notes and trying to record key comments as accurately as possible.

Another example comes from the closing of each residential session during which time each person shared any final reflections on the week's experience. The researcher took no notes and volunteered his reflections. The researcher, although in a unique role, was still part of the community. At times such as these, it seemed important to the researcher to put his role as a

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[3]This undercurrent did eventually manifest itself and become effectively resolved.

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participant in the community ahead of his observer role.

Choices also had to be made regarding when to observe which project team. This was a boundary issue as well as a research issue. The researcher needed to obtain data on all four teams. This could be done through direct observation and subsequent interviews with the participants and PTAs. However, his relationship with participants was to a large extent maintained through observation of teams and the periodic feedback that the researcher provided when invited by the PTA. If the researcher did not observe a team for most of any given week, one or two members of that team would invariably ask, "Where have you been this week?" At times the researcher decided to move to another team, even when he was interested in what was going on in the team he had been observing. Whenever the researcher entered a team's work area for observation, he asked their permission: "Is it all right that I sit in?"

Boundaries with the ARL™ Inquiry Team The inquiry team members not currently doing the field work played an important role in the field researcher's focus in the field. Whyte (1984), quoting his teacher, Everett Hughes, writes:

> "The most important things about any people are those that they take for granted." Therefore, the participant observer must periodically question the dynamics of behavior taken for granted. It is useful to leave the field every few weeks and report what you have been learning to people unfamiliar with the scene. (p. 27)

This was clearly the case in this study. Early on we used the metaphor of a "kitchen cabinet" to capture the relationship between the field researcher and the other members of the Inquiry team. Between residential weeks the Inquiry team met to debrief and reflect on the field researcher's experience and observations. During these meetings the other members of the Inquiry team posed questions about the story that was unfolding, heightening the researcher's awareness of certain events and raising issues of theoretical interest.[4]

Boundaries between the field researcher and the Inquiry team revolved around the degree to which the team could provide an outside perspective to the field researcher. Because the field researcher was the primary source of data, other members of the research team were dependent on his summaries and discussion of his experience. The team gave the researcher guidance as to what members might do in the next round of field work, but they also had to trust him to use his judgment in the field to modify focus and direction based on his on-site assessment.

The team was designed as a mix of people internal and external to LIM. One of the external members had not been previously associated with LIM, nor was he directly involved with the client or its program. He was, however, a colleague of the field researcher, and became his primary sounding board in between meetings of the research team, for reasons of both geographic proximity and professional bonds as colleagues. This team member took on a role within the research team that shared characteristics resident in ARL program design, that is, building in the perspective of the outsider who can ask questions that might otherwise not occur to those more familiar with the situation.[5] The outsider can often see and voice norms and assumptions that have become taken-for-granted by insiders.

There are also boundaries that had to be managed between the ARL™ Inquiry team and the LIM practitioners. The research was initiated because LIM is interested in being consistent with what it is selling—engaging in reflective practice. Yet as the research evolves, the interpretations of the team may not be fully shared by all in LIM. This relationship between LIM and the Inquiry team must be developed as the research moves forward.

Lessons for the Study of ARL and Similar Programs Within Organizations

We began our research with a design that we had to modify to meet the needs of the client. Upon reflection, we realize that what seemed, at the time, a compromise has turned out to be a strength. The design has enabled the ARL™ Inquiry team to identify important design variables from the

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[4] It should be noted that these roles will shift as the research is extended into other companies. The participant observation role will be filled by other members of the team.

[5] The LIM research co-ordinator was consciously aware of building in this "outsider" role. However, the Inquiry team never explicitly discussed this aspect of the role until they gathered to analyze the full data set.

ground up before embarking on a more ambitious research project.

The design has also enabled the research team to understand in fuller detail the sensitive dynamics that exist around boundary management that have a much greater impact on the program than we would have anticipated. We anticipate, eventually, a research design that involves teams of participant observers. The issues that we have raised in this paper will be useful in briefing the research team, and in planning for explicit discussion among research team members of boundary management issues as they emerge. We will also plan carefully for feedback as the program progresses with PTAs and the Program Director that takes the fragile nature of the relationships into account.

As the Inquiry team reflected on the complexity of the field worker's role, we were struck with the way in which the research reinforced, and was modeled upon, the same principle that is at the heart of ARL program design: the introduction of the role of the sophisticated barbarian who, by his/her very nature as an outsider, is intended to see the situation through fresh eyes and to use those insights to help raise critical questions that lead to reframing of one's understandings of what it means to be a manager and leader. ARL intentionally nurtures this capacity in participants. The PTA is to model this function. Through the research, we introduced a field worker who took this role as well, although not intentionally or consistently.

Project teams are designed so that no one is already an expert to ensure that naive questions get raised. Diversity is also built into teams to ensure that new ways of looking at a problem are considered. Likewise, a key aspect of the PTA role is to help participants gain fresh insights. The research has the potential for introducing this same function at yet another level because he/she is asked periodically to share the outsider's perspective with participants, PTAs, and the program director. The field worker could thus model at a level, one step removed, the same process that the PTAs try to model for the participants so that they, in turn, learn how to raise fresh questions within the program, and eventually, back on the job.

From an ARL perspective, then, it might not be desirable for the field worker to keep his insights completely to himself. Yet, from the research perspective, the field worker had to manage sufficient distance so that he could retain the eye of the outsider, as well as minimize bias that could occur if he became too fully assimilated into the program's culture. The ARL™ Inquiry team played a key role, in this regard, and extended out to yet another level the function of the sophisticated barbarian by the fact that they, in turn, tried to raise naive questions of the field worker.

Schön (1987) describes this kind of phenomenon as a "hall of mirrors," in which the person functioning as a learning facilitator is engaged in the same process as that in which learners are engaged, even though the context of their practice might differ. Hence, one can use the interactions between learner and facilitator to address the same dilemmas that are inherent in the learner's situation because these interactions mirror those faced by the facilitator. Schön discusses this phenomenon vis-a-vis the teacher as a coach; we have looked at it here in terms of a common design principle—raising fresh insights for purposes of learning. LIM might pay attention to the potential of this role for enhancing fresh insights, particularly in relationship to the PTAs and the human resources director, and occasionally in relationship to participants in the program as well. The Inquiry team, in turn, can take this role vis-a-vis the field worker.

Finally, there is another boundary in this case study that, given space limitations, has not been explored, but of which the researcher must be very aware: that is, the boundary between the program and the larger organization.

There is a long tradition of action research, in which researchers study the change they are facilitating. Here, the researcher is on the periphery of the action, although he or she does play a role in helping both participants and staff reflect on what is happening. Our experience suggests that much can be learned from such a "helicopter" perspective of the entire field.

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